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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on possible solutions to the problem of special education personnel recruitment and retention. Options for increasing the supply of direct service personnel include: augment salaries and benefits for educational personnel; facilitate improved working conditions and status for personnel involved in direct service; train educational personnel to be recruiters for the profession; educate personnel other than traditional educators to be teachers and service providers for students with disabilities; provide training stipends in amounts sufficient to support full-time participation in special education personnel preparation programs; develop strategies for increasing the pool of special educators from underrepresented groups and professionals to work in especially underserved areas; improve the quality of special education personnel preparation programs; and enhance and expand cooperative business, government, and education recruitment and retention programs. Solutions for the problem of recruiting and retaining leadership personnel include: make salaries and benefits available to teacher educators and other special education leadership personnel competitive with those of other professions; provide stipends, other forms of financial support, and program options that will allow career educators to pursue doctoral study; emphasize quality aspects of special education leadership training programs; enhance and expand cooperative relationships between schools of education and public/private school systems; improve personnel preparation leadership recruitment strategies and contingencies; improve and expand strategies for retaining leadership professionals through the use of skill improvement, skill development, and other options. Obstacles, barriers, and inhibitors to obtaining the ideal include the need for commitment of appropriate resources, the lack of coordinated recruitment and retention plans, and the lack of shared responsibility for education. (16 references) (JDD)

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Recruitment and Retention: Emerging Trends in Special Education and Implications for Training Personnel

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Defining the Issue

A significant shortage of teachers and other professionals trained to work with children and youth with disabilities currently exists (Bowen, 1988; Smith-Davis, Burke, & Noel, 1984). This well documented shortage is expected to become even more acute when the number of U. S. public school children age 5 through 13 rises to approximately 34.5 million in 1995. Retention of personnel able to serve the needs of exceptional students and their families is also increasingly becoming an issue (Grosenick & Huntze, 1981; Zabel, 1987), and overwhelming evidence attests to the fact that many qualified educators leave the profession prior to retirement (Zabel & Zabel, 1983). Finally, the supply of teacher educators is diminishing, and there is strong evidence that as the current generation of special education professors begins to retire in the next decade there will be insufficient numbers of quality professionals to take their place (Sindler & Taylor, 1987). These contentions are widely accepted and a variety of data from a number of sources are available to confirm them.

The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the existence of a special education personnel recruitment and retention problem. The problem, at least in general terms, has been clearly identified. Thus, in this paper we focus on several possible solutions to the problem, including obstacles to implementing the solutions. Strategies are offered for recruiting and retaining direct service personnel as well as leadership professionals.

Alternative Solutions

A myriad of potential strategies can be proffered for recruiting and retaining quality professionals to work with children and youth with disabilities, only a few of which are identified in this paper. It is our position that there is not a single solution to this dilemma, but rather, recruiting and retaining quality special educators and support personnel must involve multifarious strategies.

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Alternative solutions for recruiting and retaining direct service personnel.

Based on recent findings of the Institute for the Study of Exceptional Children and Youth at the University of Maryland, approximately 22,000 new special educators become available each year. However, the attrition rate among practitioners is some 25,000 per year, which means 3,000 special educators annually leave the profession. Obviously, the development and maintenance of high quality programs for exceptional children and youth will in major part be a function of the availability of well trained professionals. We offer the following options for increasing the supply of direct service personnel. Alternative solutions are not listed in priority fashion.

Augment salaries and benefits for educational personnel, including those who work with students with disabilities. This often identified solution is not a panacea for personnel shortages. Nonetheless, it is naive to expect that recruitment and retention solutions will occur without appropriate attention to this factor (National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education, 1985). While among the most obvious of the solutions, it may also be among the most difficult to implement. That is, as noted by Morsink, in her introduction to this monograph, education must compete with a number of other important needs for local, state, and federal resources, including road and highway improvement, mental health, and law enforcement. Nonetheless, as stated by Smith-Davis and her colleagues (1984), "We are not going to get educational excellence on the cheap" (p. 218).

Facilitate improved working conditions and status for personnel involved in direct service. In addition to issues associated with relatively low salaries, educators report that their chosen profession affords limited recognition (Carnegie Forum Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986). As a result, the perceived value and effectiveness of educators have eroded over the past decades, and many educators report that their societal worth is less than it should be (Sykes, 1983). Moreover, teachers report that the conditions under which they are expected to work makes remaining in the field a significant personal challenge. For instance, aggressive and assaultive students; overcrowded schools and classrooms; inadequate administrative support; nonprofessional assignments (e.g., lunchroom supervision); overwhelming paperwork; and out-of-date textbooks and equipment are but a few of the problems with which teachers must contend. Further, lack of power and perceptions that they are unable to control the destiny of their profession are common (Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Mitchell, 1982). Finally, the profession is perceived as offering few career ladder options.

That is, classroom or administrative assignments are often the only choices for educators, as opposed to a variety of career opportunities.

In addition to the above identified challenges, public school teachers of disabled students have reported feelings of isolation and exclusion. In this regard, special education personnel may perceive their personal worth to be less than their colleagues in regular education and to feel that they are not fully accepted. Moreover, special education personnel may lack resources and support systems to fully and effectively serve their students. That is, they may be required to contend with unacceptablely large class size and case loads, and lack planning time, paraprofessional support, ancillary support services (e.g., speech pathology, occupational therapy), consultation opportunities, parent cooperation, mental health services, and appropriate in-service opportunities (Myles & Simpson, 1989).

Train educational personnel to be recruiters for the profession. It is well recognized that members of a profession are among the best recruiters for the profession. Thus, just as dentists, veterinarians, accountants, pharmacist, etc., are themselves uniquely able to describe the responsibilities and advantages associated with their profession, and can therefore serve as spokespersons and recruiters for their career choice, teachers can also be used to bring talented individuals into the field. Unfortunately, educators have recently received notoriety for advising others to choose a profession other than education. Nonetheless, it must be recognized that teachers and other educational professionals can be trained to recruit individuals into the field, including students of elementary, secondary and college age. Additionally, educators can be trained in the use of support measures that will extend the tenure of professional educators.

Educate personnel other than traditional educators to be teachers and service providers for students with disabilities. In addition to recruiting for special education individuals trained as general and special educators, the profession should consider identifying and training individuals with arts and sciences degrees and experiences. This approach is not new, and in fact a number of talented special educators have been developed from among individuals lacking traditional educational backgrounds. Thus, individuals with college degrees in other than education and degree-holding persons experienced in other than education who seek alternative careers should be given an opportunity to be educated to work with students with disabilities. There is no question that individuals lacking school-of-education training require appropriate course work, experiences, and training before being allowed to teach students with disabilities. However, with appropriate training these persons should be able to assist in meeting current and future special education personnel demands.

Provide training stipends in amounts sufficient to support full time participation in special education personnel preparation programs. While some colleges and universities are able to offer special education training stipends, the amounts are frequently of insufficient size to support full-time program participation. This is particularly true for post-baccalaureate students. As a consequence, those individuals with a particular interest in working with students with disabilities are often forced to accept non-special education positions while pursuing their special education certification and/or degree programs on a part-time basis. Therefore, the availability of personnel able to accept special education teaching and support service positions is significantly slowed and diminished. Thus,one mechanism for increasing the availability of special educators entering the profession is to increase the number and size of personnel preparation stipends. We also endorse use of contingencies for assuring that stipend recipients make a contribution to the special education field. For example, stipend recipients would either be required to work in the particular area of their profession (such as rural, inner city, transition, etc.) for a predetermined length of time or repay their stipend.

Develop strategies for increasing the pool of special educators from underrepresented groups and professionals to work in especially underserved areas, including rural and inner-city programs. Shortages of trained personnel for educating children and youth with disabilities are widespread. However, there is a paramount need for minority teachers and other professionals who are members of under represented groups. These individuals serve as role models for minority students and their families and are in a fortuitous position to bridge cultural, language and value differences between home and school. Similarly, significant shortages abound for personnel to work with disabled students in inner city and rural areas, and retention of high quality special educators in these settings is an acute problem.

Strategies for recruiting and retaining the aforementioned personnel must by necessity be comprehensive and multifaceted. That is, no single method can resolve the problem of recruiting and retaining special educators from under represented groups and individuals for rural and inner city settings. Thus, stipend and loan incentives, salary incentives, moving expense support, community support programs, community-based recruitment campaigns, professional advertising promotions and programs, guaranteed summer employment, preferential employment for spouses, programs to encourage high school students into teaching careers, and preservice training programs explicitly designed to provide specific types of experiences (e.g., rural field experiences) are but a few of the programs which should be encouraged.

Improve the quality of special education personnel preparation programs. Individuals interested in entering the

teaching profession must be exposed to high quality instruction which is both stimulating and effective. Such training stimulates and invigorates individuals in the profession and draws into special education programs personnel who are bright, talented, creative, and dedicated. Moreover, individuals who are effectively trained are more apt to understand the demands of the profession and to be effective in their jobs, thus increasing their tenure in the profession.

High quality instruction must specifically go beyond awareness and knowledge training and emphasize development of application skills. That is, it is no longer acceptable for special educators to simply be made aware of issues and techniques. Rather, they must be able to effectively execute appropriate skills.

Enhance and expand cooperative business, government, and education recruitment and retention programs. More and more the public and private sector are calling for cooperative planning and programming. The dependence of private business on quality education is becoming increasingly apparent, and as a result students' performance is more and more being correlated with international competitiveness. Accordingly, the public and private sector are recognizing the need for mutually beneficial action plans. In this regard, cooperative strategies for increasing the supply of personnel for educating students with disabilities must be designed and implemented. Just as citizens plan recruitment programs for identifying and bringing to their communities physicians and other professionals, programs can be developed for recruiting and retaining special educators. Specific recruitment and retention methods vary from community to community, but have involved such things as apprising perspective employees of community recreational and leisure resources and unique qualities of a region; providing a service-free bank checking account; providing complimentary apartment rent for one month; guaranteeing summer employment; allowing for restaurant and shopping discounts; and inviting newly hired educators to join community clubs and organizations. Such efforts assist newcomers to adjust to their settings and to form positive community contacts and attitudes. Without question these factors are often the foundation for teachers remaining in special education as well as in a particular setting.

Business and government leaders are increasingly recognizing that high quality educational programs are basic to the growth and development of their communities. For that reason, these decision makers appear motivated to help schools and agencies recruit high quality special educators. School personnel will most likely need to take the lead in orchestrating effective special education personnel recruitment and retention programs, but their effectiveness in this regard will be significantly enhanced by working with business and government personnel.

Alternative solutions for recruiting and retaining leadership personnel

Through an analysis of position announcements listed in the Chronicle of Higher Education from 1975 through 1986, Sindelar and Taylor (1987) determined that the number of available special education positions increased while the number of doctoral graduates decreased. Sindelar and Taylor projected from their data that demand for doctoral level special education personnel will surpass supply unless enrollment in doctoral programs increases. Smith, Pierce, and Keyes (1988) reported similar findings, noting that there is now and will continue, at least in the foreseeable future, to be a shortage of doctoral level special education faculty. Smith and her colleagues also observed that demand for special education leadership personnel will be intensified by expansion of programs to serve infants and toddler age groups and by development and expansion of transition, technology and life-span services. Similar to the direct service personnel shortage problem, strategies for increasing the quantity and quality of special education leaders must be identified and implemented. Several options for increasing the supply of quality doctoral level special educators are identified below.

Salaries and benefits available to teacher educators and other special education leadership personnel must be competitive with those of other professions. As in the case of direct service providers, teacher educators and other doctoral level leadership personnel can be expected to assume positions wherein they will be able to prepare quality teachers and other professionals only if appropriately compensated. Moreover, high quality personnel will continue to pursue avenues other than teacher education doctoral degree programs unless salary and benefit packages are improved. Thus, unless college and university salaries and benefits are competitive with those of public schools, agencies, and private business, there will continue to be an erosion of quality personnel available for teacher preparation. According to Grassmuck (1990), "Officials of both public and private universities across the country are bracing for an unfavorable economic climate in the 1990's". Yet, it is unrealistic to expect that the number of special education leadership personnel will increase independent of salary and benefit gains.

Provide stipends, other forms of financial support, and program options which will allow career educators to pursue doctoral study. Just as special education training stipends for direct service personnel are insufficient to support program participation, so too are resources for leadership professionals. Individuals qualified to pursue doctoral degrees are more and more unable to afford advanced graduate study, thereby even further reducing the number of persons able to assume teacher education and other leadership positions. The fact that many individuals most appropriate for doctoral study are of an age and position (e.g., have dependent children, own homes) to need

substantial assistance underscores this need. Hence, appropriate financial support is considered a basic ingredient in solving the special education leadership personnel supply dilemma. In exchange for stipend support, individuals would be required to assume special education leadership positions for which they were trained.

It is also recommended that the Division of Personnel Preparation, Office of Special Education Programs, allow for stable stipend support. That is, rather than limiting Federal personnel preparation program funding to a maximum of 36-60 months, select programs would continue to make stipends available for longer periods of time after other personnel preparation funding ceases (e.g., monies to support travel, personnel). Decisions regarding which programs would be eligible for such funding would be competitive. In this regard, factors such as program quality and impact on the field -- the number and percentage of prior stipend recipients who have successfully assumed teacher education and other leadership positions would be salient factors.

It must be recognized that recruiting individuals into special education doctoral programs will require more than increasing the size and number of stipends. Measures such as allowing for part-time program participation, for at least a portion of students' doctoral programs, and allowances for conducting dissertation research in doctoral students' work settings should also be considered. These and other measures for supporting individuals interested in advanced special education study are available to some degree; however, it is our opinion that such options need to be greatly expanded.

Emphasize quality aspects of special education leadership training programs. Creative efforts to increase the quantity of leadership personnel should never be undertaken at the expense of quality. In other words, the answer to the special education leadership dilemma can not be interpreted to be an increase in less capable or less qualified personnel. Such a strategy would only create serious direct service, financial, and public confidence problems. Now, more than ever, quality standards must be identified and applied, particularly as program options such as part time study become more available. It is our belief that emphasizing quality factors will not only enable the profession to better retain personnel but will make recruitment efforts more effective as well.

Adherence to quality standards depends on one's interpretation of abilities, experiences, competencies, and skills needed for special education leadership. It is not the intent of this paper to specifically identify these factors. However, we suggest that individuals admitted to special education doctoral training programs have appropriate master's degrees or equivalent certificates; evidence of leadership-level cognitive and language skills; and successful, appropriate

professional experiences (e.g., special education direct service experience of at least 3 years). We also recommend that leadership personnel be trained for positions they will eventually accept. In the case of teacher educators, we recommend that students' programs involve appropriate training for personnel preparation, along with leadership-level research and service experiences and training. The profession can no longer accommodate doctoral level teacher educators whose primary interests, experiences, and training are in other than teacher education (e.g., research). It only makes good sense that individuals who assume tomorrow's leadership positions have training and experiences in those areas consistent with their future roles.

Enhance and expand cooperative relationships between schools of education and public/private school systems. Colleges and universities can be expected to experience continued competition for the role of preparing educational personnel, including special education leaders. Increasingly, public school systems and other educational/clinical entities are contending that their personnel and resources allow them to effectively undertake personnel preparation also. It is our belief that professional schools of education are uniquely qualified to prepare personnel, but only if they form effective and equal partnerships with the practicing profession (i.e., public and private school systems and other educational/clinical entities).

Practicing professionals are in an excellent position to be aware of skills and competencies needed for direct service and leadership success. They truly should have input into professional school of education curriculum and management decisions. Moreover, they have practica, internship, and clinical experience resources along with functioning models and adjunct faculty needed for effective training. Furthermore, they offer research sites and opportunities which are conducive to working on relevant and important problems and questions. Finally, school system personnel are able to recommend and help develop training programs for particular types of leadership personnel most needed to meet the changing demands of education. It is clearly evident that successful leadership personnel preparation programs must involve partnerships between professional schools of education (which have teacher education experiences, theoretical perspectives, research resources, etc.) and school districts. While in some instances this may need to be a "forced marriage", it is one that indubitably must occur.

Professional schools of education and public school districts would be well advised to form ongoing and meaningful relationships with the private sector. In truth, colleges and universities should effectively and cooperatively relate to school district personnel and, in turn, then both groups must cooperatively work with private business. As noted in comments relating to direct service personnel, cooperative strategies between education and the private sector are needed for special

education leadership planning, program development, and program modification. Moreover, the private sector represents an important, albeit largely untapped, personnel preparation support resource, one which will become more important as public resources become more sparse. Without argument, availability of private resources will be contingent upon cooperative and mutually beneficial relationships among higher education, school districts, and the private sector.

Improve personnel preparation leadership recruitment strategies and contingencies. Replacement of the aging professorate in the coming decade will make recruitment of special educators for leadership training an ever increasing priority. With that as a given, creative and multifaceted strategies ought to be proposed, implemented and evaluated. Moreover, it is our opinion that higher education, practicing school professionals, businesses, and business leaders orchestrate plans for bringing talented and appropriate individuals into leadership preparation programs. Heretofore, recruitment of individuals for special education doctoral programs has received casual and amateurish attention. We recommend that future recruitment strategies be based on state-of-the-art information and strategies. The private sector has significant talent in this regard, and higher education has demonstrated know-how in limited areas (e.g., athletics, music), albeit in an extremely competitive form. This same commitment to the identification of methodology for bringing in to special education doctoral programs those individuals with the talent, creativity and experiences to fill the imminent leadership void deserves to be undertaken. This should include, but must not be limited to, recruitment and retention of individuals from under-represented groups.

Currently, individuals submitting applications to the Division of Personnel Preparation, Office of Special Education Programs, under the Preparation of Leadership Personnel priority (CFDA 84.029D), are expected to provide a recruitment plan. In that plan they are asked to identify how they will go about the process of recruiting appropriate persons for their leadership training programs, including individuals from underrepresented groups. In so doing, the United States Department of Education demonstrates the importance of personnel preparation leadership programs having appropriate strategies for bringing into the profession individuals with needed prerequisite experiences, skills, and other credentials. It is our recommendation that this proposal component be maintained; however, we believe that more carefully developed and documented procedural recruitment plans will facilitate improved resource utilization. Consequently, we recommend that proposals submitted under the Preparation of Leadership Personnel priority include explicit and detailed recruitment plans and strategies. Moreover, subsequent proposals for resources to prepare leadership personnel should be required to include previous training information, including the number and percentage of

stipend recipients who graduate, the number and percentage of stipend recipients who accept positions in settings for which they were trained (e.g., how many individuals who receive doctoral degrees emphasizing teacher education sponsored by Federal resources accept positions in teacher education), and the number and percentage of stipend recipients from under represented groups. By so doing, programs would not only be judged on their original recruitment plans but their success in following these plans as well.

Improve and expand strategies for retaining leadership professionals through the use of skill improvement, skill development, and other options. College and university professors report that their perceived value to society has been weakened along with the conditions under which they must work (D'Arms, 1990). This appears to be particularly true for teacher educators (DeLoughry, 1990). So just as direct service personnel have experienced increasingly stressful and inhospitable conditions, so too have teacher educators. Accordingly, one basic and inescapable solution to the shortage of high quality teacher educators is to improve higher education conditions, including teaching assignments, advisement loads, resource availability, and shared decision making opportunities. By so doing, administrators, students, and citizens will be more able to hold accountable those individuals entrusted to prepare personnel to educate the children and youth of this country.

Retention of high quality teacher educators can be facilitated by expanding and improving retraining, professional growth, and post-doctoral options. This strategy makes effective use of current teacher educators to meet changing needs (e.g., vocational, transition, health-related disabilities) as well as invigorating, and thus maintaining in the field, experienced teacher educators. There is no question that one solution to the current teacher education dilemma is to increase the number of new people entering the profession. However, it should also be apparent that an equally important strategy is to make better use of existing teacher education resources.

Obstacles, Barriers and Inhibitors to Obtaining the Ideal and Strategies for Moving Toward the Ideal

Like it or not, educational recruitment and retention problems will be neither quickly nor easily solved. Shortages of qualified educational personnel, including those interested in working with students with disabilities, are expected to continue for at least the near foreseeable future. This situation, at least in part, is a function of the need for basic educational reform. That is, without basic structural and philosophical changes to our educational system, problems of recruitment and retention of quality personnel to work with students with special needs will continue.

Educators cannot wait for educational reform to solve their recruitment and retention problems. Thus, in addition to working for basic change, alternative solutions must be considered, including those suggested in this paper. These potential solutions will not be easy to implement. Rather, obstacles, barriers, and inhibitors are to be expected. Nonetheless, educators must work for adoption of programs which will increase the availability of quality educators, including those for children and youth with disabilities.

Resource availability and commitment. It is obvious that money and resources are not the only solution to the current recruitment and retention problem. Yet, it is undeniable that little positive change will occur without commitment of appropriate resources. President George Bush, at the 1989 education summit in Charlottesville, Virginia, observed "improving schools means bringing hope to those who need it most. Let no child in America be forsaken or forgotten". Such rhetoric, which has obvious significance for children and youth with disabilities, is an important first step. However, it must be accompanied by monies and other resources.

There is agreement in this country that education must be a priority. However, education must compete with a number of other worthy needs (e.g., improved roads, bridges, programs for homeless families, improved public health programs) for resources. Such competition, in combination with unrealistic public and governmental expectations that high quality education can occur without additional resources, are the primary obstacles with which educators must contend.

Educators are in an excellent position to lay claim to resources needed for change. In order to take advantage of this fortuitous position, however, they must be politically active and aggressive. In this regard, educators must (a) work to maintain education's paramount position; (b) collaborate with legislators and other decision-makers to engineer programs, including recruitment and retention proposals; and (c) assertively pursue resources needed to improve programs for all students, including those with special needs. Educators must also be accountable to the public at large and all decision makers by demonstrating that additional resources are effectively being used to increase the quantity and quality of educational personnel. Consequently, the profession may not only advocate for additional federal, state, and local monies, but should demonstrate that these additional resources lead to personnel improvement.

Lack of coordinated recruitment and retention plans. In order to effectively recruit and maintain high quality personnel, educators need an orchestrated plan and coordinated methods. Traditional recruitment and retention programs have the complexion of an amateur in design and organization. This unfortunate situation applies to recruitment and retention of

both majority and minority professionals. Obviously, this barrier to effective recruitment and retention must be removed.

Circumventing the problem of effective recruitment and retention will require us to seek direction from outside the profession. In particular, marketing specialists from business can provide technical assistance needed to develop plans to recruit and retain quality educators, including those for children and youth with special needs.

Pilot recruitment and retention programs and strategies have yielded positive results. For example, the National Center for Student Retention, Inc., in Iowa, provides assistance to college and universities in the following areas:(a) reducing drop-out rates, (b) retaining special student populations, (c) galvanizing faculty, staff, and administrators in service of campus-wide retention efforts, (d) improving student services, (e) improving recruitment programs, (f) improving institutional images, and (g) improving students learning environment and quality of life. Indeed it has been proven that recruitment and retention efforts are likely to bring about positive results.

Recruitment and retention of minority professionals must receive special consideration. As suggested above, this activity should only be directed by professionals familiar with proven recruitment and retention methods. Therefore, programs such as the ones advocated by Scott and Fox (1989) are not only useful but mandatory. Scott and Fox (1989) suggest early intervention and continuing education of local residents as recruitment activities and mentorship programs, positive role models, and financial information dissemination as retention vehicles. They also offer specific plans for facilitating greater sensitivity to needs of minority students.

Lack of shared responsibility for education. For too long, educators have attempted to "go it alone". That is, they have undertaken the difficult task of providing a quality education to every child without the benefit of community, business, and political support. This situation has not been totally self-imposed. Nonetheless, until only recently, educators have done relatively little to promote the advantages of sharing educational responsibility with business leaders, legislators, and the communities they serve.

As noted by Ernest Boyer (1990), president of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, "Teachers simply cannot do the job alone. Colleges must forge partnership with schools. Business and industry leaders must promote better education" (p. 5). In this context, solutions to recruitment and retention problems will require creative involvement of a variety of individuals and institutions. Clearly, it is only through such a process that the goal of developing an adequate supply of quality educators for all students, including children and youth with disabilities, can be achieved.

Basic methods and strategies have been identified for establishing more effective liaison between education and other entities (e.g., business, government). Programs which create linkages among institutions of higher education, state education agencies, local education agencies, local, state and federal government, business leaders, and organizations such as the State Education Advisory Committee, The Council for Exceptional Children and its divisions, GSPD committees, and recruitment and retention networks, are daily proving their worth. It is incumbent upon educators now to work to further develop, extend, and multiply these relationships.

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